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REMARKS BY **AMBASSADOR JAMES F. MORIARTY**

Decentralization: The Fourth “D”

CHITTAGONG, NOVEMBER 4 -- U.S. Ambassador James F. Moriarty made the following remarks at the Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Chittagong today:
(Begin Text)

Mr. President, members of the Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry, invited guests: Thank you for your kind invitation. It is a real pleasure for me to be with you today. For those who are counting, this is my third visit to Chittagong Division since my arrival in Bangladesh almost seven months ago. I feel rejuvenated each time I come to Chittagong and am able to feel the energy in this vibrant port city. It is a particular pleasure for me to be in Chittagong while a U.S. Naval vessel is paying a port call. This is another tangible sign of the strong relationship that exists between our two countries.

I know that many of you have heard me talk before about the “three D’s.” For those who have not, the three D’s highlight the three pillars of our bilateral relationship: Democracy, Development, and Denial of Space to Terrorism. Since this is the day of the American election, I will spend much of my time discussing democracy – and how it is practiced in my country. Later, I will suggest for your consideration a fourth D—Decentralization. This fourth D is a vital component of democracy as it is practiced in the United States.

To begin with, however, I invite you to celebrate with me a key event in my country’s history: November 4, is a very important day in the United States. My fellow citizens are preparing to cast their ballots to elect a new President.

History will be made today when the people of the United States elect either our first African American President or our first female Vice President.

These candidates teach a valuable lesson: where do new leaders come from in America? Barack Obama started out as a community activist. He then ran for and got elected to the Illinois state senate. Finally, he became elected a U.S. Senator from Illinois.

Sarah Palin describes herself as a typical hockey mom. What she means is that she was a mother who cared so deeply about her children that she became involved in local politics. After getting elected mayor of her small town, she became governor of the lightly populated state of Alaska.

Both Barrack Obama and Sara Palin got their political start at the grassroots level, learning that in a democracy, politics means to serve the people.

I am a passionate believer in the importance of local government. Some of you may have heard me talk about my father. World War II prevented him from attending college. After serving in the war, he came back to my home town, and worked for the post office for 30 years. After his retirement, my father ran for and was elected as a Representative in our State Legislature in Massachusetts. He represented my home town and five other villages with a total population of 40,000.

My father gave me a unique perspective on government at the local level. I saw him work 14 hours a day, listening to his constituents, helping them with their problems, ensuring that government served them. He never missed a funeral or a wedding. But more important, his constituents knew where to find him, and knew he would work to protect their interests. To me, this was (and still is) the essence of democracy - and one of the greatest strengths of my country's political system.

From my conversations with my Bangladeshi friends, I realize that the Presidential elections in the United States have generated great interest here and around the world. In fact, I am only able to spend a short amount of time in Chittagong this visit, because I need to return to Dhaka to host a celebration of our election tomorrow morning.

Much has been said and written about the Presidential election in the U.S. There has been much talk about the implications of a victory by Senator McCain or Senator Obama. There has also been much talk about the U.S. Congressional elections that will be taking place today. And there has been much talk here in Bangladesh about the December 18 parliamentary elections.

It is important who becomes President of the United States or Prime Minister of Bangladesh in the coming elections. It is equally important who will replace those individuals 10, 20, and 30 years in the future. In the United States, those future Presidents will likely be running in elections today. For offices such as state representative, mayor, or congress person.

They will serve in those offices. Based on the quality of that service, the people of their city, county, or state will decide whether those individuals have earned the right to higher office. In the United States, democracy is practiced not only at the national level, but also at the local level, much closer to home.

As Americans, we believe passionately that problems should be solved at the lowest possible level. Of course, certain responsibilities rest with the national government. In the first years of our Republic, Americans realized that they needed strong institutions to defend our nation against enemies abroad, or to conduct our relations with the rest of the world.

But the framers of our Constitution also saw dangers in concentrating too much power in the Federal Government. They believed that the strength of America, both its economic and political vitality, could best be preserved by strong local institutions.

No political system is perfect, and no two societies are exactly the same. The people of Bangladesh must decide the future of their own country – and the shape of their own democracy.

Some of you know I have now been here in Bangladesh for seven months. In those seven months, I have heard many people comment on how much power resides in Dhaka. Many people in Chittagong seem to think this is a serious handicap for the system. Over the years, Bangladeshis have become conditioned to think that every problem needs to be solved in Dhaka. That opportunity only existed in Dhaka. That only national leaders sitting in Dhaka, most specifically the President or Prime Minister, could solve problems.

As a result, over the years, more and more power has concentrated in Dhaka. Members of Parliament came to see themselves as the only individuals capable of deciding what was needed in their areas. Representatives of line ministries took their orders from Dhaka. And local institutions were relatively weak and underdeveloped.

Some of the smartest Bangladeshis have told me that some degree of political power must flow from Dhaka to the regions. For democracy to be strengthened. For prosperity to reach those most in need. For violent extremism to be defeated. For Bangladesh to reach its potential. For these reasons and more, decentralization must take root.

Again, Bangladeshis will decide what sort of democracy suits them best. The December 18 Parliamentary elections will mark a major step forward in democracy in Bangladesh. Similarly, December 28 upazilla elections could also mark a major step forward in Bangladesh's democracy – if the people of Bangladesh decide that they want functioning local government structures headed by representatives freely elected by the people.

If allowed to do so, elected Upazila chairmen could do much to build democracy at the grassroots. Just as important, upazilla elections could help create Bangladesh's next generation of political leaders. But again, these are decisions that the people of Bangladesh must make.

In recent years, the United States has supported programs aimed at strengthening local governance capacity. Our support includes strengthening the ability of local governments to deliver basic public services; increasing the generation of local resources; and ensuring transparent and participatory management of local resources. In the areas affected by Cyclone Sidr, we will continue to work with local communities to strengthen their ability to participate in the planning process to ensure that their needs are addressed in development and reconstruction programs.

The United States welcomes the initiatives begun by the Caretaker Government to strengthen local government; the United States looks forward to working with the next Government to implement these reforms. I am encouraged that the senior leaders of both major parties have repeatedly stressed to me their commitment to strengthening democracy at the local level.

I challenge you all to play a role in discussing the issues that are critical to you for improving governance at the local level. As members of the business community, your voice must be added to those discussing ways to strengthen Bangladesh's democracy.

In closing, I would like to again thank you for this kind invitation. I would also like to thank my friend Yusuf Haroon for helping to organize today's event. Chittagong has a vital role to play as an engine of Bangladesh's economic growth. The importance of a well managed port, the role that the security agencies based in this city play in providing security along Bangladesh's maritime borders, and the contribution of industries located here are all self evident. This has been my third visit to Chittagong, but I can assure you it will not be my last. Nor will this be my last interaction with the members of the Chittagong Chamber.

With those few words, I would be happy to answer your questions.

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** As prepared for delivery*

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Note: A Bangla translation of this speech is also available at the American Center. If you are interested in the translation, please call the American Center Press Section, Tel: 8837150-4, Fax: 9885688; e-mail: DhakaPA@state.gov; Website: [http:// dhaka.usembassy.gov](http://dhaka.usembassy.gov)